

SERMON

Preached before the

RIGHT HONORABLE

THE

Lord Mayor,

And the

COURT of ALDERMEN,

AT

GUILD-HALL Chappel

Upon the 13th. of July, 1673,

By BENJAMIN CALAMY.

fellow of St. Katherine's-Hall in
CAMBRIDGE.

L O N D O N,

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EMMON

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To the Right Honorable
Sir ROBERT HANSON
LORD MAYOR
OF
LONDON
And to the
RIGHT HONORABLE
the Court of
ALDERMEN.

Right Honorable,

I Was not so well perswaded of my
self or my performance; as in the
least to suspect, The Sermon I preacht
before you should ever become more
publick than the Place, wherein 'twas
deliver'd, had made it; but since you

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have determin'd otherwise, I do without any prefacing Excuses (which might seem a dissembl'd, and in this case an ill-manner'd modesty) readily expose it to the world, & humbly present to your favourable accedance.

I have not taken liberty to enlarge, suppress, or alter ought of what was then spoken, partly to secure my self (at least in this particular) from the challenge of those men whose prejudice or perverseness made them both unjust, and uncharitable Hearers; as also, to free your Honour from the charge of patronizing more than you were pleas'd voluntarily to undertake: but mostly, that I might give proof of the strict obedience I owe to your Commands.

I should (according to Custom) say
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something towards the recommendation of this discourse to your perusal, did I not hold it more decent (besides that I am little conversant in that sort of Oratory) to submit it to the unprepared judgment of each honest Reader. I shall only crave leave to add ; If by means of this or any other argument the Inhabitants of your most renowned City be prevailed on, every man in his respective station, diligently, and in the fear of God (not meddling with other folk's) to mind his own business; and, avoiding foolish questions and whatsoever is vain and unprofitable, endeavour to discharge the plain and indisputable duties which he owes to God, his Neighbor, and himself; you will soon find (besides the greater and Spiritual advantages) your Magistracy

cy far more easie and Honorable, and
your Ci tizens more Wealthy and
flourish ing.

Right Honourable,

Your most humble and most
Obedient Servant,

Benjamin Calamy.

A Sermon Preached in the Chappel
at *Guild-Hall*, on the 13th. of
July, 1673.

Titus 3. 8, 9.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly; that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men.

But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law: for they are unprofitable and vain.

From the conclusion of each verse it is plain, that the Apostle intended a comparison between two different employments; the one of doing good and living well: the other of disputing, and contending about those matters of religion, which are of less moment: commanding *Titus* most earnestly to recommend to Christians (as the most important part of their profession) the maintaining of good works; for these, saith he, are good and profitable unto men: but not to trouble himself or others a-

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bout any foolish questions, or unnecessary disputes; for they are vain and unprofitable.

It is by all agreed that by good works in this place, as in many others, is chiefly to be understood some honest labour and vocation; and by being careful to maintain them is meant abiding in that station and profession God's providence hath placed us in, and chearfully and contentedly undergoing the duties that belong thereto: And in this stricter sense the meaning of the Apostle may be, that, although at the first plantation of the Gospel many were taken from their homes, and families, and dayly employments, that they might wholly attend that great work they were designed unto, of propagating Christianity in the world; yet when that had once prevailed, and the Church began to be settled, then were all people to continue in their former lawful trades, conditions, and relations, and to earn their livelyhood by the same means they used before. They were not to expect that Christ should continually, (because twice he did the multitude that followed him,) feed them and their families by a miracle: nor were they to think that, because he came to redeem them from sin and hell, therefore the liberty he purchased for them extended so far, as to free them also from the common toils, cares, and drudgeries of humane life: or that by the state of Christianity they acquired any extraordinary peculiar right to the creatures of God; as if they, by vertue of their Saint-ship, were freely to enjoy the fruit of other mens labours and to eat up what their neighbours had wrought for: nor are
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we now bound to spend all our time in long prayers reading of godly books, talking of Christ and Religion, running from one Sermon to another, and so consume whole dayes in formall exercises of devotion, whilst in the mean time our domestical and secular affairs are neglected and left at random: for our Christian profession doth not cancel any of our natural or civil obligations; but rather enjoyneth us to be more diligent, and faithfull in the performance of them: And when we work in our particular Callings, when we bargain and trade, and do this justly and honestly, whereby we are in some measure usefull to others, and doe provide for our selves, and those that depend on us, and are enabled to succour and relieve those that are in want and distress, we do more truly and really worship and honour God, and serve the ends of our Christianity, and fulfill the intentions of our Saviour, than by many other things, that are in far greater vogue and esteem amongst us. In particular, *St. Paul* prefers it here before idle disputes in Religion. And if these good works, our common worldly business, be so much better than babling and wrangling about Religion; then surely good works in the largest sense, the matters of Righteousness and holiness, are of infinitely greater concernment.

What those foolish Questions were, which *St. Paul* here adviseth against is not very easie at this distance of time to determine, and is as needless now to enquire: since of this we are sure, that the Apostles caution against this itch of disputing is as necessary,

and seasonable in our daies, as ever it was in his: we living in an age so much infected with that disease, and bewitched with the same mischief, wantonness, and wickedness (for I can't call it less, since it justles out our true and undoubted duty) that the primitive Christians did not more exceed ours in the hearty practice of Christs doctrine, than this present age doth transcend all the foregoing in vain janglings, and uncharitable heats about opinions, that are either impertinent, or indeterminable, or altogether unprofitable.

Never was there a time, wherein there was more talk, or bustle and adoe made about Religion, and yet so little of the power of it seen in the world; whilst every one is most eager, and busie in defending and propagating those doubtful doctrines, which distinguish their several Sects and Factions, and so few mind those great and certain truths, wherein they all are, or at least pretend to be agreed. And when we consider the present state of Christendome; and observe into how many different parties it is crumbled, all undermining and damning each other; how the minds of Christians are exasperated one against another; when we see some so busie in coining new words and phrases, which by their ambiguity and loose signification may raise contentions, and keep up wrangling in the world; others, either torturing and wracking themselves about things that never can be understood, or else sweating and quarrelling about an indifferent rite and outward circumstance of worship; many with great fury opposing the plain-

plaineſt truths, rather than not diſpute at all; moſt placing the greateſt part of their Religion in their Orthodoxy; When we ſee men ſo needleſſy diving into the judgments of others to find occaſion of diſſenting, paſſing their ſentence upon every man accord- to the party he adheres to, and thinking God ^{found} as their way and form as they themſelves are: when men ſhall ſeem ſo afraid of the leaſt errour, and yet not baulk at doing the moſt ſhameful things: When the ninth chapter to the *Romans* ſhall be ſtudied more than our Saviour's Sermon on the mount: when confidence and paſſion are taken for zeal for God and his glory, and cenſuring, reviling, and a proud impatience of contradiction are thought conſiſtent with grace, and a diſputable doctrine is made the mark of Gods people: In a word, when by theſe means our common Religion ſuffers in its credit and repute, the Church of Chriſt is rent, the quiet of civil ſocieties is endangered, and thoſe two antient vertues of love and peaceableneſs (the badg of the primitive Chriſtians) quite loſt amongſt us; I ſay, if theſe things be conſidered, it will eaſily appear that in this our age St. *Paul's* advice here in my text is as neceſſary, as it is proper, to cure, or allay ſo great and prevailing a debauchery amongſt us.

In my diſcourſe on theſe words I ſhall ſhew, Firſt, that our Saviour or his Religion gave no real occaſion to thoſe many diſputes which now trouble the world. Secondly, how they began and are ſtill continued. Thirdly, the miſchiefes and inconveniences that attend them. Laſtly, recommend to you the care

care and practise of good works.

That our Saviour and his Gospel gave no real just occasion for those controversies, which since have been so hotly mov'd, will appear if we consider a little his doctrine, and way of teaching whilst he was here on earth: for we shall find all along that he delivered his message not in any studied, artificial, spruce and affected method, but with the greatest perspicuity and plainness imaginable. He accommodated not his discourses to the learned or wiser part of mankind only, but to the ignorant and simple. He did not feed mens curiosities with any unnecessary speculations, nor endeavour to procure the reputation of an extraordinary wisdom by profound and unintelligible doctrines; nor did he any where speak obscurely, but when it was to punish inveterate obstinacy. His design was not to make men greater Clerks by furnishing their minds with any sublime notions, or communicating to them any useless subtleties, but only to make them better and honest men, by directing them in, and obliging them to the practise of all vertue. And this he did in a most familiar manner, expressing his commands in such words, and perswading men by such arguments, as might serve for use, and answer the end of them. What he taught men were such things, as they were presently to perform, not to study them only, and exercise their contemplative faculties upon them: And herein was the difficulty, not in understanding them, but in practising of them. Some things indeed our Saviour said, which were very hard, such
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as selling all and giving to the poor, cutting off our right hand, plucking out our right eye, denying our selves, taking up his Cross, forgiving all Injuries, loving our Enemies &c. Not but that these were intelligible enough, but people don't like such doctrines, and they require more paines and trouble than most are willing to put themselves to. But to comprehend our Saviour's discourses, and to conceive his Religion, it was sufficient then, that you had a mind ready to perform whatever he commanded, that you should be modest and teachable, that your understandings should not be blinded with any carnal prejudices, Pride, or any by interest, though you never understood any Logicks or Metaphysicks.

It is plain that our Saviour did so far avoid disputations, and was so little a friend to them, that whenever any nice questions were propounded to him, he either gave no answer at all, but diverted his discourse to something that was more material and practical; or else gave such answers as did sufficiently shew his dislike of them. He was so far from insisting on any thing that was disputable, that, in all the Gospels, where his speeches and actions are related, excepting what hath happen'd in common to them with other Books that were writ so long ago, there are not above three or four places, that by art, craft, and interest can be made doubtful: And truly this was so remarkable in all our Saviour's Sermons, that I can't forbear saying, that if he were now again upon earth, and should preach after the same manner he did before, not using those phrases and terms, which
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since his time have been invented, and are now current amongst us, too many would censure him for a Moral Preacher, and would suspect whether he were thoroughly sound in the faith.

Thus also, if we consult the Acts of the Apostles, we shall find it was in the first and early times of the Gospel. Much pains it cost them to convince Gentiles and Jews of the truth of our Saviours Religion, and to take off their prejudices against it, and his person, and to resist and gainsay Apostate Christians, who would set up new Religions of their own in opposition to Christ's; but or little none, in comparison, to make them understand the Doctrine of it, when once they were ready to follow and embrace it. They did not perplex their hearers with any quirks and intricacies, but avoiding all needless disputations, which engender strife, and are not unto edification, told them plainly, that *Jesus* commanded them every where to repent of their sins, and to forsake them, and to believe his Gospel, and become his disciples, and obey what he enjoyn'd in being temperate, humble, just, and charitable, and they should be forever happy in the other world; and that for the effecting of this, the Son of God came down from heaven, and lived here amongst men, and died, and rose again; of which they were Witnesses. This indeed did greatly scandalize the quarrelsome disputers of those times, who derided and contemned the Doctrine of our Saviour preached by the Apostles, as having nothing extraordinary in it, but propounding only old natural truths in such a manner
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method as very Idiots might understand, and shewing nothing of skill or artifice worthy of a Philosopher, or to be compar'd with what was to be found in their Ethicks. Thus *Celsus* afterwards argued that the Gospel of Christ was so easie and plain, that it did not suffice to prove any thing of divinity in him; against which *Origen* sheweth, that he objected against that which was the greatest commendation of our Religion, and did render it most useful to mankind: for most certain it is, whilst the Gospel was thus delivered in its native purity and simplicity, it was far more *effectual* for the reformation of men, and did vastly more prevail upon the world, than the most elaborate *Lectures* of the Philosophers could in their dayes, or than the best modern Systeme can do in ours.

If we judge of our Religion by those accounts which the first writers of the Church have given us of it, we shall find that they never thought the Gospel any notional or speculative Science, but a plain rule of life; that they propounded but very few things as absolutely necessary to be believed by all Christians; that they placed nothing of Religion in their opinions, but minded more whether men were Orthodox in their manners, than in their judgements. Their Religion made not such a great noise in those dayes, but they rather demonstrated the power and efficacy of it in actions suitable to its fundamental principles. So that to mortify their lusts and appetites, to subdue their passions, to encrease in vertue, was the study and labour of the primitive Christians; to abound in good works, not at all concerned whether they were the

causes or effects of Justification. It is true, Some disputes soon arose in the Church, and what gave occasion to them I am next to enquire.

Some did arise even in the Apostles dayes; occasion'd either by that great *respect* and veneration the *Jews* had for *Moses's* lawes and institutions, or that fond presumption they had of Gods particular inconditionate favour to them, and his absolute *election* of the seed of *Abraham* only; or else by the wickedness of those, who for some private ends would pretend to Christianity, but being unwilling to undergo the severities of it invented such *doctrines*, as might best serve to patronize their lusts and impieties.

If we examine *St. Pauls* writings, (from which the firebrands of the Church have us'd all along to fetch all their heat, and by whose example they have thought themselves tolerated, if not encouraged, to dispute every thing) and consider those controversies he was engaged in, we shall find that they were either such as by asserting the obligation of the Mosaick law, or denying the *resurrection* and the like, did overthrow the very foundations of Christianity; or else they were, not by any remote forc'd consequence, but directly in their own nature wicked and impious; such as were the Heresies of the Gnosticks, Nicolaitans, and others: and against these it concern'd the Apostle to be very zealous. But he never medled with any needless questions; much less did he ever intend that his Epistles should serve to determine all those curious points about which learned men in after-ages should perplex themselves, and others.

others. Nay, he expressly and frequently warn'd men against doubtful disputations; and when he was hottest and most earnest in confirming our faith, or answering gainsayers, yet he forgot not to tell men, that vertue and practical goodness was to be preferr'd before all disputing either for God or Religion, and that these things only were to be constantly affirm'd, and most earnestly press'd upon Christians. Thus though there were disputes then, yet they were chiefly between Christians and their open and professed enemies, or such as had Apostatiz'd from them, or were but in part converted: but for some considerable time (whilst the persecutions lasted) the Christians amongst themselves lived in all love and peace, professing the same Faith, joining in the same Worship, and agreeing in the same Principles and practises.

But when once our Religion had triumphed over all others, and brought the greatest part of the world to its subjection, and the Princes of the Earth, and the great and Wisemen became Christians, and there was no publick enemy either Jew or Gentile to oppose, and find work for busie wits, then they began to fall out about their own Religion: and this still encreas'd more, as the Christians grew more learned and idle, and less honest, and found time and leisure to study Philosophy, the greatest part of which about that time was nothing else but Sophistry, or the Art of wrangling, and making plain things obscure. Hence those that came over to Christianity from Plato's School, and had before imbib'd his notions,

and were famous for their learning in them; that they might still keep up the same repute, presently they made Christ and St. *Paul* to speak *Plato's* sense, and interpreted them according to his Philosophy, and delivered their doctrine in his words and phrases, and then invented wayes to reconcile what seemed different, and so disturbed the Church, and gave occasion to many dangerous Errours and Heresies. Thus in other instances, those, who had before professed themselves disciples of any great Master, blended his Maxims with the sacred Oracles, interpreted the words of Scripture according to his definitions, and try'd the truth of them by his Rules and Aphorisms, till at last there arose as many Sects in Religion, as as were before in Philosophy.

For the ending of these controversies many Councils were called, Books writ on both sides, publick disputations appointed: all which served only to widen the breaches and harden both parties; and on these accounts Christians soon fell to persecute one another with as great rage and violence, as ever themselves had been before harra's'd either by Jew or Gentile.

To come nearer to our own age: After some considerable time, *Aristotles* Philosophy prevailing most in the World, there arose a generation of men well vers'd especially in the Metaphysical part of that verbal philosophy, who endeavouring to apply to it the doctrine of our Saviour, so mangled and dis-jointed every part thereof, and altered the complexion of the whole by reducing it to the method of a Science;
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and leaving those plain expressions wherein it was first delivered, and instead of them using hard words and terms of Art, that if a primitive Father were now alive again, it would prove an hard task to persuade him, that these men taught the same Religion he lived, and died in. If they found any thing in the Scripture different from what they had before receiv'd, then a new question is found out; then distinctions are called in to their aid, and in discussing this, which was started by chance, many others are raised, till what was in it self most easie shall become the subject of a Volum and large Folio: and, which is worst of all, this they have don about practical duties, the nature of Faith, Repentance, Charity, and the Sacraments, defining them with as much curiosity, and disputing about them with as great subtlety, as they ever us'd to do about any of their own trivial problems: so that I may truly say, it is easier to be justified in a Scripture sense, than to know all that belongs to it in the School-mens; and it requireth less pains to believe in Christ, as our Saviour meant it, than to understand what it is, as they explain it, who fetch the greatest part of what they call their Orthodox divinity out of those mens writings.

Had this been the exercise only of learned men, it had not been worth complaining of, especially in this place: but it is now come to passe that many of our Confessions of Faith and Catechisms are stuffed with these fine and gay definitions and distinctions; they are accounted necessary to Salvation; and to keep to plain and intelligible words only, brings men under
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the suspicion of Heresie. We shall be counted dangerous persons, if we use not the very same forms and schemes of speech, as these subtle Divines do, though they be such as neither those that first invented them, nor those that dayly use them, understand ought by ; every private person now swaggers with these Philosophical terms, and is apt to think more of Religion to lye in getting by rote, and talking over some of these insignificant phrases, than in the constant practise of Holiness. Thus to say that Faith is the instrument of justification is sound and pious, but to say it is the condition of it, shall bring upon a man some odious Nick-name or other. And I can't mention any greater cause of disputes than this *viz.* vain Philosophizing about the Scriptures, and using words of Art instead of those which are plain and vulgar : and should men at length resolve, when they dispute, first, exactly to agree about the sense of their question, and then, as far as may be, only to use those words, which are by every one understood ; many controversies would soon vanish, and the disputers of this world be ashamed to find, how earnestly they had been employ'd about nothing.

But yet by any thing I have now said I would not be thought to perswade you that there was nothing in our Religion, that was difficult or mysterious : there are without all doubt some things contained in Scripture, which are past our understandings, the particular modes and circumstances of which we cannot perfectly comprehend ; but only, that it would have been much more for the honour of God, the interest

terest of Christianity, and the good of Souls, if men would have suffered those things which were mysterious to have remained so, and also left those things that were plain in the same condition they found them.

1. It were much to be wished that men had never gone about to explain those things which were mysterious, and to give an account of those things which themselves acknowledg'd incomprehensible. For hence have arose those fierce contests about them, not so much from the words of Scripture, though never so hard to be understood, as from those explications, and solutions which bold men have given of them.

If we read over the Arguments framed either by antient or latter Hereticks against the mysteries of Religion, we shall find the most of them exceptions only against those words, which are not found in Scripture, but invented by men, and imposed on our belief by those, who had a mind to pry into the secret things of the Divinity, and to determine ~~and~~ positively even of those things, which yet they all confesse to be out of their kin and reach.

Besides, this it most ordinarily happens, that these pretended explications make the points themselves far more difficult, and instead of clearing them make them more obscure and intricate, and give occasion to the adversaries of the truth to make the stronger arguments against them.

2. It were to be wished also that men would have suffered those things which our Saviour had spoke plainly to have remain'd so, and not clouded and involved

volved them, by affected niceties about them. But alas ! such men think that to believe a thing that is plain is not thank-worthy : Every one may do that, but if it be thwack'd full with contradictions, if it be contrary to our carnal reasons, then it is a peece of self-denial, and of submission of our understandings to the divine ; and it made not much for the honour of the Priest, if his Sermon consisted only of such things as every one at the first hearing could comprehend ; just as it is said of some of the old Philosophers, that they delivered their Doctrines in Riddles and Allegories, that they might not be prostituted to vulgar understandings. And thus hath the Gospel in a great measure been rendred useles and ineffectual for the ends and purposes it was first design'd.

Had I time in particular to shew how such idle disputes in matters of Religion are still continued in the world I might tell you,

1. Some men there are of a voluble tongue, and of a talking prating humour, who debate and dispute about every thing, and therefore Religion shall not escape if ever it comes in their way ; you can say nothing but they presently contradict and oppose it. These are the eternal Disputers. Contention is in the brain and bloud of such men ; and therefore the only thing I would desire of such is, that, since they must be continually talking, they would rather employ their talent about other matters of Trade and common converse, or their secular business, than disgrace and affront our holy Religion

gion with their impertinent tattle, and empty chat about it.

2. Others there are that are pretty cool, tame, and calm, and can discourse freely and civilly about any ordinary common affair, but let the smallest and most inconsiderable point of Religion be started, and they shall be presently all on fire, and as quarrellous as if they had been born disputing, and as fierce as if at the pronouncing of every Article of their belief their Swords were to be drawn, and it was to be fought out. These are the zealots, that maintain and foment divisions, and make them almost incurable; such an one cannot meet with a man, that denies or doubts of any thing he thinks himself certain of, but he is either furious and outrageous, and can hardly be kept from spitting in his face and pronouncing against him the sentence of reprobation; or else with the greatest scorn and pride he pities the poor mans ignorance and blindness, thanking God, who hath revealed his secrets, and communicated to him such choice truths (as a pledge of his peculiar love) which he hath hid from the rest of the World. And this eagerness and commotion he shall look on as an extraordinary duty of Christianity, and that by spending his lungs in big words and loud talk he very nigh as much serves the truth, as the first Martyrs did in laying down their lives for it. Add to this what may be often observed, that the little useless questions are managed with more warmth and concern, than those which are more considerable. Men shall not be so forward and impatient in disputing

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with a Jew or a Mahometan, nor so zealous in furnishing themselves with arguments to prove Christ to be the *Messiah*, as against some outward gesture, or for some trifling opinion. But let such know, that all this is nothing else but brutish passion, fondness, arrogance, self-conceit, and the reason they please themselves so much in it, is, because they hope it will make amends for their want of a zeal of good works; and the day is certainly coming, wherein Mildness, Meekness, a modest distrust of our own Judgments, and a due submission to the Authority of the Church we are Members of, shall far more recommend us to God, than all our zeal for opinions, let them be what they will.

3. Others there are who furnish themselves for dispute by reading a great deal of Scripture, and getting it by heart, and so pouring it forth upon all occasions, interpreting it as peremptorily, and explaining it as confidently, as if they were guided by the same infallible Spirit, that the Writers of it were endued withal.

What a number of Sects and odd kind of opinions have been raised in the world by this sort of people I need not now reckon up: but such had better first try their faculty whether they can conquer all the intricacies of Law, and difficulties of Physick: and they would do well to remember that there were those in *St. Peters* dayes who wrested some of *St. Pauls* writings to their owndamnation: that men may more profitably spend their time in studying the Gospels, and those places which contain their duty, rather than those

those which were writ on some particular occasions referring to those times, and the sense of which is and hath been ever since controverted; That great Learning, skill in Languages and Customs of the Jewes, knowledge of history, and judgment to compare places together, is required for the finding out the meaning of those difficult texts of Scripture, and that therefore it is great presumption and folly for every pert fellow to determine the sense of them, about which even learned men after long study and diligent search pronounce but doubtfully and modestly.

4. Others there are, who are very eager in maintaining a great many opinions, which are not to be found in Scripture, but in some Authors they have a great esteem of, or first chanc'd to read, or were directed to by those whose judgments they most valued; and these mens Books such make their Bible, and from them fetch all their Divinity. Thus every one almost lifts himself under some great Name, and resolves to defend to the utmost whatever his Master saith though never so hurtful or ridiculous, wonders at any one that will not readily swallow down whatever he can bring his Authority for, and most carefully withstands the force of all arguments that can be brought to the contrary, as so many dangerous temptations to draw him from the truth.

I might add further, that some are continually disputing out of ostentation, thinking it a piece of great Scholarship, and, if it be, I am sure it is the most useless kind of learning in the world; others, out of pride, who think it disgraceful to change their opi-

nions, or ever to confess an errour, and therefore wil not let go what they have once believed, though on never such slender grounds: many disputes are maintain'd out of interest, such especially as are between us and those of the Roman Communion, most of which would soon fall to the ground, and men would be asham'd to be engag'd in them, could the state and grandeur of the Sea of *Rome*, and the Popish Clergy be supported without them; Others out of discontent and faction by men of unquiet and restless spirits; some out of humour and a vain affectation of novelty and singularity, and not a few out of a slavish subjection of our reasons and understandings and two great a dotage on Antiquity. It is St. *James's* question cap. 4. 1. from whence come Wars and fightings amongst you? come they not hence, even of your lusts?

But whatever be, and many more there are, occasions of these quarrels and debates in Religion, the inconvenience of them is great and notorious, which was the third thing I propounded to shew. In general they are certain hindrances of that which St. *Paul* doth here so much commend *viz.* Good works, or Godly life, and that chiefly these three waies, which I shall but just name.

I. This foolish contending consumes so much time of our lives, which ought to be spent in our honest Employments, in serious Devotions, and doing the offices of justice, friendship, and charity one towards another; and I doubt not but much of our Religious brawling and disputing shall be accounted for

for at the last day as idle words, for which neither our selves, nor Neighbours, nor any body else was any thing the better. Those, whom St. *Paul* warneth *Titus* in this Epistle to reject and sharply rebuke, are described as vain talkers, that spent their time in gadding from house to house; every where venting their private Doctrines: and it is to be fear'd we have many such amongst us, all whose Religion lies in their Tongues, who are continually speaking of some part of it with such fervour and vehemence, as if they loved and regarded nothing else, and yet if they should ever chance to learn but that one vertu of Modesty, or were commanded silence, or should forget those phrases they have got from Books or Sermons, they would have nothing at all to shew for their Religion; for in very deed this is nothing else but a Religious kind of idleness.

2. That which is a greater mischief than this, from hence mens lusts learn to dispute, and from these controversies in and about Religion, men have found out how to quiet their Consciences in a way of sin, and to go on securely and undisturbedly, hoping by the help of a distinction or two they shall for all that get to Heaven at last.

For it were impossible for those that professe Christianity, and at all believe, and at any time attend to the principles of it, quietly to allow themselves in such known sins, as we see them dayly guilty of, but that they also entertain other opinions which do frustrate all the commands of our Saviour, and really take away the force of all his promises and threat-
nings.

ings. And I know no better account of the degeneracy of the present Christians from the purity, simplicity, and innocency of the Antient than this, that so many now think it enough to believe wel, and that shall make recompence for their bad tempers and immoral actions. And indeed nothing less can be expected when the word Faith is only preached up, and Faith is made the whole business of Religion, and Good-works come creeping in by the By, and are advised only with a great many distinctions, cautions, limitations and conditions; when they are disgrac'd under the name of splendid sins, and filthy rags; when men are taught that they are bound to renounce them, and the like; they may easily think, that, since they are so dangerous, they may e'en as well be quite left out. When men distinguish so nicely between Faith and good Works in the matter of Justification, by degrees they come to imagine themselves to have Faith, though they have not Works. Not that the consequences of every opinion ought to be charged on all that maintain it: for, I believe there are many who are very zealous for some opinions, which are damnable, if they practise according to the just consequences of them; and yet they live very good and honest lives: but then, this is only by chance or on some other account, whilst the Doctrines they hold would draw them otherwise.

3. These disputes have been the occasion of those great breaches that have been made amongst Christians

tians: whose care it ought to be, to be of one Mind, of
 one Faith, and of one Church; and to adorn the
 Doctrine of our Saviour by their mutual good will
 and serviceableness to one another; but instead
 of this, Christians by their several little modell of
 Faith and their Passions, have made it their busi-
 ness to divide the Church, excluding as many from
 Salvation, and their Communion, as are not just
 of their own way and fancy. It would be too
 long to tell you, how men have been animated
 one against another, how their Tongues have been
 whetted to all manner of censurings and opprobri-
 ous language; what persecutions have been raised,
 what schisms have been made; and what wrath,
 strife, variance, what seditions and tumults have
 been occasion'd both in former and latter ages by a
 misguided zeal for such Doctrines and Opinions,
 as the Apostles and first Christians never so much
 as thought of, and went to Heaven notwithstanding.
 Those heart-burning, feuds and quarrels,
 which are so rife amongst our selves, and are so
 often complain'd of, are sad evidences of the Truth
 of what I have said, and sufficiently prove the
 mischief of disputing and contending about the
 less matters of Religion.

I say, about the less matters of Religion. For
 I know very well, that if any Zealot for his own
 private opinions now chanceth to hear me, he
 will presently say that I have been all this while
 preaching up indifferency of Religion, and that it
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is all one what we believe any thing or no, if so be we do but live well. But I should tell such an one, that I am far from discouraging or abating your zeal for the fundamental and substantial Doctrines of our Religion, especially in such an age as this, wherein half witted men love to shew the small parts they have in contradicting the most undoubted truths of it: about these things it becometh you to be concerned and zealously affected, because these Doctrines of the existence of a God, the immortality of the Soul, future Resurrection and judgment, the nature and offices of our Saviour and the like are the foundations of a good Life, and Holiness, without which no man shall see God.

Our Obligations to the practise of vertue and piety depend upon our stedfast belief of these things. And those questions are to be reckoned foolish, frivolous, and not worth contending about, in which the belief of either side doth not at all concern our practise, or if it doth, it is only in some indifferent, inconsiderable instance. It is true, that let an opinion be never so idle and useless, if men have labour'd in the controversy, and Love themselves and their own conceits, by one artifice or other they shall make not only a good life, but life Eternal to depend on that side they hold, and they had as good put into their Creed the particular fruit *Adam* did eat, or with what hand he pluck'd it. Such
weighty

weighty controversies, were amongst the Jews of old, managed with so much heat and vehemence, as sometimes to break out into fightings, Bloud and Murder; as, At what time in the morning one ought to begin his Prayers, whether when therewas so much light as that he could discern betwixt black and white, or not till he could discern between blew & green; How lowd a man is to speak when he Prays, whether that he may hear his own voice, or not; whether the frontal or manual-Phylacteries were to be tyed on first; or if a Child was born with two heads, on which of them his frontal-Phylacteries are to be tyed, or whether on both. I need not give parallel instances amongst us. What is absolutely necessary to be believed by all is contained in the Apostles Creed, and those things are few, plain, and useful : and Religion hath suffered by nothing more, than by mens adding to those fundamentals all their own fancies, and opinions; and asserting them with the same confidence, & propagating them with an equal zeal and earnestness.

I shall only in one word recommend to you the care and practise of Good-works. For these, saith the Apostle, are good and profitable unto men. Never was any vice cured by disputations, though many have been occasion'd by them, nor was ever any one made Vertuous by the exact knowledge of its definition, nature, and parts. Nay though I should be able to comprehend all mysteries, to determine all controversies, to convince all Hereticks, to understand all the difficulties of Religion, and to be so zealous for the truth as to give my body to be burned for it; yet if I lack but one moral vertue, all this profiteth me nothing. Goodness is certainly far to be preferred before Truth; Truth being chiefly valuable as it is

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in order to goodness, as it serves either to beget it in us, or to encourage us in the practise of it. And that knowledge of Christ, that is so often commended in Scripture, is not any airy speculative knowledg of Him, but wholly practical. For so St. *John* tells us, 1 *John* 2, 4. *He that saith, he knoweth Christ, and keepeth not his Commandments, is a Liar, and the Truth is not in him.* That Religion that spends it self all in talk and dispute, begets nothing but pride, and contempt of all others that are not so skilful as our selves; whereas the doctrine of Christ was design'd to tame our unruly Wills, to curb or charm our Passions, and to allay all our heats and distempers, and to make every one of us to our utmost useful and serviceable one to another. It is a strange notion those men have of Religion, who pretend in an high measure to it; and yet if you observe them either as to the goodness of their natures and tempers, or as to their deallings in the world with other men, or as to their behaviour in their severall relations: you shall find them not to differ from, nay often to be worse than, those whom they despise as carnal and moral men. There is a Religion that prevaieth too much in the world, that doth not make men at all the better for it; but they retain the same cross and untoward dispositions after what they call their Conversion, which they had before: whose tempers are not refined, nor inward natures altered by it, nor consequently their lives reformed any farther, than that they are afraid of those sins which are scandalous and open, or are notorious in a contrary party which they hate: Who are froward and unpeaceable, passionate and ill-natured, easily offended & implacable, unfriendly & ill-neighbours, proud and covetous; and yet hardly ever
doubt

doubt of their Election and Salvation. Now opinions, though never so true, shall not at all advantage such persons: nor on the other side shall an unaffected mistake at all prejudice an humble and honest Christian.

To conclude all, my purpose is not to perswade to any singular opinion, or to recommend any one particular Sect of Christians, but only to promote amongst us the interest of our Catholick Christianity by exhorting all to a greater care and study of those things, which never yet have bin made matter of controversie, about which all sides and parties are agreed, however they differed in all other things: viz. Of living Godlily Righteously and Soberly, in this World: for, Who ever disputed whether Temperance, or Drunkenness and Gluttony were better? None ever maintain'd that Injustice, Cruelty, Anger, Malice or Pride were pleasing & acceptable to God. In these matters there is no dispute: and the most prophane & wicked persons cannot but dislike and disapprove of sin, & commend vertue, whatever their practises are. And were but men really what they would seem to be, were the same Mind and Spirit in us which was in our blessed Saviour, had the Gospel its full efficacy and power upon us, did we impartially resign up our selves to be guided by It; either there would be none of those little disputes at all; Men would see so much worth in real Goodness and Obedience, as to think that sufficient to take up all their time, study, and pains; and this alone would sooner end all our little controversies, than an infallible Guid, or the *Pope's* Holiness, or any other means that can be propounded: or else if there did arise any disputes, yet there would none of those fore-named inconveniences follow from them.

Peace, Love and Unity might be still preserved. Did the true Christian-temper prevail in the world, one man would never be angry with another for having more or less understanding than he himself had, and difference of Judgements about things not necessary to Salvation would make no more Strife, Variance, or Breach, than difference of features and complexions. This would recover the honour and credit of our Religion, and secure it most effectually against all its adversaries, would stop the mouths of Atheists and Blasphemers (for this may have made some cast of all Religion as doubtful and uncertain, when they did see the greatest part of it made matter of endless dispute) and would hasten those happy dayes in old time prophesied of, when men should beat their Swords into Plough-shares, and their Spears into pruning hooks, when Love, Peace, and Righteousness should again flourish amongst Christians.

I shall run up all in the exhortation of St. James, cap. 3. 17. who is a Wiseman and endued with knowledge amongst you; who is he, that pretends to greater skill in Religion than other men; let him not shew it in talk or dispute. But let him shew out of a good conversation his Works with Meekness of Wisdom. But if ye have bitter Envyng and Strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the Truth. This Wisdom descend not from above, but is Earthly, sensual, divellish. For where Envyng and Strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work. But the Wisdom that is from above is first pure, then Peaceable, gentle, and easie to be intreated, full of Mercy, and good Fruits.

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